

## HANDOUT: AUTHENTIC NEEDS ASSESSMENT

<b>CONCEPT DEFINITION</b>	<p>Service learning projects should meet real community needs. In order to provide authentic learning opportunities for youth, programs must actively engage the community in identifying needs. By addressing an important community need, student actions take on greater value and importance. Students can then see their actions making an impact even as they learn and apply academic skills. Authentic needs assessment is often verified through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Various sources of media</li> <li>• Conducting surveys;</li> <li>• Observation, community mapping and research;</li> <li>• Census information or</li> <li>• Discussion with an informed community member.</li> </ul>
<b>KEY ASPECTS</b>	<p>In order to ensure that an appropriate and strong experience is performed, the S.L.A.B. should first develop performance measures which can be used to determine what the project entails (see evaluation section). Then, using the performance measures, the students should work with community partners to perform a needs assessment. The measures should be used to ensure that the site and project chosen meets both community and curricular needs.</p>
<b>STRENGTHS AS A DIFFERENTIATION PRACTICE</b>	<p>By allowing students the chance to conduct surveys and perform a community mapping, the learning process is individualized and active. Students are given the chance to direct curriculum by determining through organized methods what the project/program performed with service-learning will be. Whereas some students can be used to gather information, others can reorganize it to present to the class, school, S.L.A.B., or community. Students should be challenged to work within their skill sets as well as develop some new skills.</p>
<b>ISSUES</b>	<p>Many times teachers and administrators can perform needs assessments prior to working with students, thinking that the project will be easier or work better with curriculum. Not only does this limit students' valuing of the project, it limits their motivation to be involved with it. If a project is to be a strong one, it is absolutely essential that students work from the beginning to identify a critical community need that matches with their curriculum and interests.</p>
<b>IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENT LEARNING</b>	<p>Students who are involved with determining the needs of their community better understand the importance of their work. They recognize the limitations currently facing citizens, and tend to work more diligently to engage in advocating for change. The learning process is improved because students are placed in charge of verifying what needs to be accomplished. Because power in the classroom is placed within the hands of students, they guide their achievement.</p>
<b>OTHER CRITICAL ASPECTS</b>	<p>Community partners who meet with the S.L.A.B. early and present information on an identified need will be more likely to be involved throughout the project. Students can learn more from service-learning if community partners are involved from the beginning in working together on determining a powerful community need. In order to ensure that the need is a critical one for students to work with (not all problems are created equal!), S.L.A.B. members should ask and answer the question, "will this experience TRANSFORM the lives of those involved, especially students?"</p>

## HANDOUT: AUTHENTIC NEEDS ASSESSMENT SELF-EVALUATION

The following evaluation should be completed by Service-Learning Advisory Boards, teachers, service-learning coordinators, community partners, and especially youth to determine that the need met is authentic, that it ensures a powerful learning experience for students, as well as ensures a dynamic change for the community.

COMPLETED BY: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

	DONE	IN PROGRESS	NEED TO DO	DON'T KNOW
1. S.L.A.B. members spend time early in the project/program to verify the strength of the project by determining that a community need is met and that it is a powerful experience for all involved.				
2. The needs assessment process confirms that the project/program has the potential to transform a community rather than simply address an identified issue or meet a need.				
3. Community partners are used early in the project to review what the need is, what has been attempted previously, and how students can assist.				
4. Students are an active part in the investigation and determination of whether or not the need discussed in the community is authentic.				
5. S.L.A.B. members can clearly identify how the need will assist students in ensuring that students' civic mindedness will develop as a result of involvement with the project/program.				
6. The service emphasizes a community need that requires diverse community involvement, including those from areas of business, industry, leadership, schools, and families.				
7. The authentic needs assessment involves a community "walk about," which provides S.L.A.B. members with a clearer understanding of the community need.				
8. The needs assessment includes a review of previous project successes and challenges, and a clear determination is made as to whether students have the power to make a clear impact.				
9. Community partners are met with throughout the needs assessment process.				
10. Reflection involves active discussion with community partners in confirming the steps that students will take during the project/program.				